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Affective blocs: Understanding affective polarization in multiparty systems

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ABSTRACT

Research has suggested that affective polarization (AP)—the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked out-group—has increased, especially in two-party political systems such as in the US. The understanding of AP in multiparty systems remains limited. We study AP in Finland, characterized by a strong multiparty system and a low level of ideological polarization, between 2007 and 2019. We find that AP has increased, driven mainly by voters evaluating their least favorite party more negatively. We also propose an approach that goes beyond earlier literature, which has mostly used a single aggregate metric to measure AP. Using latent profile analysis, we find that voters are grouped into blocs that view some parties positively and others negatively. This suggests that the complex dynamics of AP in multiparty democracies involve relationships between not just individual parties but between what we call *affective blocs* that span across party lines.

1. Introduction

Political polarization has most commonly been thought of in terms of ideology. Although the exact definitions vary, ideological polarization is often indicated by a divergence in opinions, attitudes, or placement on an ideological axis (such as left-wing versus right-wing) among members in a population (e.g., Dalton 2008; DiMaggio et al., 1996; Pew Research Center 2014). The literature on polarization consists of curiously conflicting results and claims. Some sources, in the US in particular, have argued that political polarization has become a significant concern (Abramowitz & Saunders 2005, 2008; Pew Research Center 2014), while yet others claim that mass polarization is largely a myth (Fiorina et al., 2008).

An alternative definition of political polarization has focused on animosity between members and supporters of different political groups, and has been termed *affective* polarization (AP). Grounded in the social identity theory (Tajfel 1970; Tajfel and Turner 1979), AP refers to "the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked out-group" (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 406). In the US, AP between Democratic and Republican partisans has been shown to be considerable and to have increased dramatically during the past half-century (Iyengar et al., 2012); this finding has generated considerable interest and spawned numerous follow-up papers, for example, those comparing partisan animosity to racial discrimination (Iyengar and Westwood 2015), whether AP is caused by ideological cleavages (Webster and Abramowitz 2017), and on potential ways of decreasing AP (Levendusky 2018). Most research on AP has focused on the US two-party system. Recently, though, a number of papers (e.g., Reiljan 2020; Gidron et al., 2019; Wagner 2020) have examined the phenomenon in European multiparty contexts, but the understanding of AP in these contexts remains relatively limited.

In the current paper, we contribute to the understanding of AP, particularly in multiparty contexts, by examining the case of Finland. Finland is an interesting case in this respect, first, because of its strong multiparty system: the number of parliamentary parties in recent decades has varied between 8 and 11, and government coalitions have been extremely wide. Thus, the dynamics of AP in Finland are likely to be markedly different from those observed in the US two party system where the concept was originally coined. Second, Finland is a country of relatively low ideological polarization, and until 2015 it appears to have been a country of low affective polarization, too (Reiljan 2020). Thus, to the extent that ideological and affective polarization are linked to one another, Finland is a least likely case for affective polarization to occur. Were we to find evidence of strong and increasing AP in Finland, this would constitute additional evidence to the argument put forth by some scholars that ideological and affective polarization can occur relatively independently of one another (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012).

Using data from the Finnish National Election Survey (2007–2019), we examine whether AP has increased in Finland, what factors contribute to its possible increase, and what ideological dimensions (economic, sociocultural) are linked to AP. We look at whether strong partisan affect is more clearly associated with some groups than others,

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what kind of affect is displayed by different groups toward Finland's parliamentary parties, and how these have evolved over time. Finally, we employ latent profile analysis to look at whether party likeability ratings can be used to divide voters into *affective blocs* that cut across party lines. This approach makes a unique contribution to the literature on AP. We suggest that because most operationalizations of AP are based on assuming an affiliation with a single party, they are prone to mischaracterizing situations with more fluid group boundaries, such as the current context of Finland. Finally, we reflect on how our findings help in understanding AP, particularly in multiparty systems.

2. Theoretical approach, hypotheses and research questions

The concept of AP is rooted in viewing partisanship through the lens of the social identity theory (Greene 1999; Tajfel 1970; Tajfel and Turner 1979) and refers to 'the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked out-group' (Iyengar et al., 2012). In this view, polarization consists of two things: people demonstrating animosity toward those whom they do not identify with politically and (perhaps to a lesser degree) favoritism toward their political in-group. In the literature on AP, the in-group has commonly been equated with the political party (or *in-party*) that a person supports, and the out-group has been associated with those parties (*out-parties*) that they do not support. Iyengar et al. (2012) operationalize their definition of AP as the difference in ratings given by Americans to the party that they support (Republicans or Democrats) and the 'other' party. They show that AP increased significantly in the US between over the past 50 years; although in-party thermometer ratings remained largely stable, negative affect toward the out-party increased among Republicans and Democrats alike. They also present evidence that this negative affect is connected to nonpolitical attitudes, such as views of the prospect of one's child marrying someone who supports the other party and an evaluation of personality traits of out-group members. Since then, a number of studies have provided further evidence of the existence of AP and its importance, have debated the issue, or have explored related phenomena (e.g., Reiljan 2020; Gidron et al., 2019; Iyengar and Westwood 2015; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018; Westwood et al., 2018; Webster and Abramowitz 2017; Luttig 2018; Levendusky 2018; Huddy et al., 2015; Huddy et al., 2018; Satherley et al., 2020; Skytte 2020; Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Boxell et al., 2020). The same phenomenon has also been studied by others using somewhat different terminology (Lupu 2015; Lauka et al., 2018).

It is relevant to note that AP might occur independently from ideological polarization, and the relationship between the two is not yet clear. Iyengar et al. (2012) make the case that AP is not driven by ideological polarization, while Webster and Abramowitz (2017) argue that AP, in the US at least, is ultimately rooted in ideological differences. Partisan sorting, or the alignment of partisan identities into consistent ideological positions, has been suggested as a cause of both increasing ideological polarization between parties (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998) and of AP (Mason 2015 2016; Mason and Wronski 2018). However, the evidence for these claims is mixed. The causal chain might also operate in a different way; AP may drive sorting and, therefore, ideological polarization (Lelkes 2018). In a cross-country comparison, Reiljan (2020) finds that European countries display all combinations of high and low ideological and affective polarization, noting that the link between the two is weak. It also appears entirely possible for people to denigrate their political out-groups using ideological terms without actually holding a meaningful, consistent set of political positions, further muddying the relationship between ideological and AP (Mason 2018). In any case, it makes sense to differentiate between the two for theoretical purposes as well as the sake of practical implications. It is possible for citizens to disagree on policy while still retaining mutual respect and warm affect, as well as having similar opinions but holding each other in disregard.

For the most part, research on AP has been done in the US, which has the convenience of being a two-party system with two roughly equal-sized, ideologically diverging parties. This makes conceptualizing and measuring AP fairly simple compared with political systems with multiple parties and less clear-cut divisions. Some recent studies have looked into AP in other kinds of political systems, but the understanding of the phenomenon outside the US is still relatively limited. The available studies suggest that AP is a universal phenomenon. Evidence has been found for its existence and increase over time in Sweden (Huddy et al., 2018), the UK (Huddy et al., 2018; Westwood et al., 2018), and Belgium and Spain (Westwood et al., 2018). Partisanship appears to be a stronger predictor of out-group prejudice than many other social cleavages, such as ethnic and religious attributes (Westwood et al., 2018). Comparative studies that have included Finland have suggested that affective polarization increased slightly but remained low between 2007 and 2015 (Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2020). Nevertheless, there is a growing perception that Finnish politics is becoming more polarized, and that the importance of political social identities is rising (Isotalo et al., 2020). Based on this literature, our first hypothesis is:

H1. Affective polarization in Finland has increased from 2015 to 2019

Research has also shown that increasing AP seems to be driven more by increasing out-party animosity than an increase in-party favoritism (Iyengar et al., 2012). Voters see their least favorite party in more and more negative light, rather than turning more positive in their view of their own party of choice. Although it is possible that these dynamics play out slightly differently in a multi-party system than a two-party one, these findings lead us to hypothesize:

H2. To the extent that AP has increased, this is driven more strongly by increasing out-party hostility than by increasing in-party favoritism

Recently, Reiljan (2020) has introduced a measure of affective polarization, the Affective Polarization Index (API), using it to compare levels of affective polarization across European countries and the US by using Comparative Study of Election Systems (CSES) data. This approach, which we will adopt and extend, is based on assigning a single in-party to a survey respondent and comparing their in-party rating and average out-party rating. His analysis indicates that AP is present in European party systems and, in many cases, is higher than across the Atlantic, with Southern and Eastern European countries relatively more polarized compared with countries in Northwestern Europe.

The API measure is highly useful, but it suffers from one major deficiency because of a limitation in the CSES data: the respondents can usually name only one party that they feel close to, and therefore, their in-group has to be defined as consisting of a single political party. In reality, in a multiparty system, people probably feel more kinship with some parties and display animosity toward several others. Therefore, it is possible that average out-party affect would remain constant while the difference between the highest and lowest out-party ratings grows or that negative affect increases toward a single party only. API does take this into account to some degree by weighting the importance of parties in determining the AP value by their vote share in the most recent elections. Some measures aim to do away with assigning party affiliation to respondents or by using like ratings to classify partisans (e.g. Wagner 2020). A disadvantage with inferring partisan leaning from like ratings is that it conflates party attitudes, which the ratings measure, with party belonging. Arguably, these are separates concepts (Greene 2002), the latter of which more closely relates to the concept of in-party as it has been used in literature on affective polarization. As of now, there is no consensus on how to party affiliation in multiparty contexts.

We contribute to the literature by proposing an approach that can reveal some of the details in the development of AP that remain invisible for measures like the API, which focuses on average out-party affect. Using latent profile analysis, we examine whether voters are clustered into a number of groups smaller than the total number of parties, within which there are signs of favoritism toward one and of animosity toward another set of parties. We call these groups *affective blocs*. This approach

allows us to examine the development of AP at a level larger than that of one party, which we argue is important for understanding how the phenomenon manifests itself in multiparty contexts. Unlike previous approaches (e.g. Huddy et al., 2018; Knudsen 2020), ours is not based on *a priori* grouping parties based on blocs or government coalitions or selecting a subset of parties for analysis (Boxell et al., 2020). Thus, our analysis is guided by the following open research question:

RQ1: What kinds of affective blocs can be found by analysing attitudes towards parties?

As noted above, findings concerning the relationship between ideological and affective polarization are mixed. This may be because different dimensions of the ideological spectrum (e.g. economic left-right, sociocultural) may have different effects on AP. Our analysis of affective blocs contributes to knowledge on the relationship between affective and ideological polarization by examining which particular dimensions of ideology could be a contributing factor to AP. Thus, we examine the extent to which affective blocs overlap with different ideological cleavages identified in the existing literature. Westinen and Kestilä-Kekkonen (2015) found the electorate in our case country, Finland, to be divided into two blocs on the sociocultural dimension, the conservative bloc and the red-green liberal bloc. On the traditional socio-economic dimension, they found three blocs: left-wing, blue collar and right-wing blocs. Due to the mixed results in earlier literature and the exploratory nature of this analysis we do not have strong expectations on which of these ideological dimensions is more strongly aligned with affective polarization. Thus, the second open research question guiding our analysis is:

RQ2: To what extent do the affective blocs overlap with the ideological divisions on the economic and sociocultural dimensions?

3. Case selection, data and methods

3.1. The case of Finland

Analyzing the case of Finland is useful for better understanding AP in multiparty settings and the relationship between affective and ideological polarization. Finland's party system is characterized by the existence of multiple governmental parties and wide coalition governments. During the four parliamentary periods analyzed here (2007–2019), the number of parliamentary parties has varied between eight and 11. Government coalitions have been extremely wide, with the current Marin government including five parties, the previous Sipilä government three, the Katainen government six and the Vanhanen government four. Unlike in the two-party system of the United States, where the concept of AP was coined, in a multiparty setting citizens are not given the possibility to simply identify with one party and distance themselves from the other. Studying AP in the Finnish context, thus, helps in understanding how the phenomenon of AP differs between two party and multiparty systems. In particular, our analysis of affective blocs is useful for understanding dynamics of AP across party lines and how these dynamics may affect the formation of government coalitions.

Finland is also a country of relatively low ideological polarization (Dalton 2008; Reiljan 2020). Thus, to the extent that affective and ideological polarization are linked, Finland is a least likely case for AP to occur. But as noted above, the existing evidence on the link between affective and ideological polarization is mixed, some scholars claiming the link is relatively strong and others arguing that ideological and affective polarization can occur relatively independently from one another (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012). Finding strong and increasing AP in Finland would constitute additional evidence for the latter argument.

The biggest change in the Finnish party system during our analysis period (2007–2019) is the rise of the populist Finns Party. It was a minor player in 2007, grew to become the largest opposition party in 2011, and joined the government in 2015. Splitting shortly afterwards, it again became the second-largest party in the 2019 elections and the largest opposition party afterwards. At the same time, the traditional 'big three' Finnish parties—the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, and the National Coalition Party—have suffered at the voting booths. This change in the party system is a likely driver of AP between supporters of different parties or possibly even an indicator of the wider polarization of society.

Finally, Huddy et al. (2018) found that in Sweden, partisans with an ideological stance consistent with that of their preferred party show more favorability toward parties within the same coalition (Huddy et al., 2018). It is important to note that the process for forming government coalitions is very different in Sweden and Finland and thus, our analysis of affective blocs is markedly different from Huddy et al.'s approach. In Sweden, parties have traditionally been (until the latest election) grouped into two blocs which have been expected to form a government together if their coalition gets enough votes, which has made it sensible to study polarization between these blocs. Finland, meanwhile, has been characterised by shifting government coalitions which have often included parties from opposing ends of the political spectrum. In the Finnish context we would, nonetheless, expect partisans to display favoritism toward not just their own party, but the parties associated with similar views and identities.

3.2. Data

We used data from the Finnish National Election Survey (FNES), which, since 2003, has contained the Finnish part of the CSES.[1] We used data from 2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019, each survey having been collected shortly after the respective year's parliamentary election. The FNES data extend back to 2003, but because of differences in the wordings of several relevant questions, we only focus on the surveys conducted since 2007.

In measuring AP and partisan affect, we draw from Iyengar et al. (2012) and Reiljan (2020). We used responses to the questions "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?" and "Do you feel you are a little closer to one of the political parties than the others?" and categorized those who answered "Yes" to either one as partisans. Then, we used responses to the question "Which party?" to assign each respondent to an in-party. We only included respondents for whom we could name a parliamentary party as the in-party. We refer to respondents who reported feeling close (st) to a party as partisans or supporters of that party. Each respondent had been asked to rate the parliamentary parties on a scale of 0–10 with the following question: "What do you think about the following (political) parties on a scale of 0–10, where 0 means 'strongly dislike' and 10 means 'strongly like' [Party]?" We only included respondents who gave a score to all of the parties that were named.[2]

3.3. Measuring AP

We used the *Affective Polarization Index* (Reiljan 2020) for measuring polarization. The API is computed by first grouping respondents by party affiliation and then taking the average rating of each partisan group for each of the parties. This yields an N x N matrix of average ratings, with N

[1] All data employed in the current study can be obtained via the website of the Finnish National Election Study Consortium: https://www.vaalitutkimus.fi/en/. Likewise, all Python and R code used in the analysis is available on Github at https://github.com/aasitus/affective_blocs.

[2] Blue Reform was a parliamentary party from 2017, but lost all of its seats in the 2019 election. We did not use the party thermometer ratings for this party and discarded its participants. Movement Now gained a seat in 2019, but the survey did not include a thermometer question about it, and we similarly discarded its partisans.

being the number of parties in parliament. Each group's AP score is then computed by taking the weighted average of the differences in ratings given to the in-party and each out-party. Formally, the AP score for partisans of party n is

$$AP_n = \sum_{\substack{m=1 \\ m \neq n}}^{N} \left(Like_n - Like_m \cdot \left(\frac{Vote\ share_m}{1 - Vote\ share_n} \right) \right)$$

where $Like_m$ stands for the average rating given by supporters of party n for party m. For the weighting, following Reiljan, we used the vote share obtained by each party in the latest parliamentary elections. The weights are relative to the total vote share obtained by parties other than P. Before weighting, the vote shares were normalized to sum up to one.[3] The final API score could then be obtained by taking the weighted average of the N party polarization scores, with each groups' weight again being equal to the respective party's vote share. Thus, the final index is

$$API = \sum_{n=1}^{N} (AP_n \cdot Vote\ share_n)$$

This index and each partisan group's score theoretically ranges from −10 to 10. Negative scores, however, would be unexpected, given that such a score indicates that partisans prefer an average out-party more than their in-party. We used this index value to compare the polarization levels between various years, most importantly between 2015 and 2019. To perform a significance test, with bootstrapping, we computed 99% confidence intervals for each survey-year's index value by creating 1000 resamples of each dataset and computing the API value for each resample.

3.4. Exploring affective blocs

In a second, exploratory step of analysis, we examined interparty rating matrices and the ratings given by each individual respondent to investigate the interparty relationships more closely and to better understand how AP occurs in a multiparty context. Finally, we used a latent profile analysis (LPA) on the respondents' party ratings to explore whether voters tend to cluster into blocs that hold several parties in relatively high regard, which would indicate that AP in a multiparty system is not limited to relationships between single parties.

Given a set of observed multivariate variables, LPA can be used to identify a latent categorical variable, a cluster membership, that underlies the data. The observed multivariate distribution—in our case, the distribution of party ratings—is assumed to consist of a mixture of multiple multivariate normal distributions, or profiles, with each cluster having its own profile. LPA attempts to find these profiles and then give each respondent a probability of belonging to each cluster. In practice, observations are usually assigned membership in a cluster to which they have the highest probability of belonging. Thus, a respondent's membership in a cluster is assumed to explain their values of the observed variables by describing the distribution from which they were sampled. Pastor et al. (2006) present a concise description of the method, which is also known as latent class analysis, especially when used with categorical manifest variables (Collins and Lanza 2010), latent class cluster analysis (Vermunt and Magidson, 2002), and finite mixture modeling (McLachlan and Peel, 2000).

In our case, we aimed to find a small (relative to the total number of parties) number of clusters within which the respondents would rate the parties similarly; then, we examined the prevalence of membership in each of these clusters in different parties. There are two ways to investigate cluster prevalence in groups: by fitting a model and investigating group (in our case, party) differences or by including group membership as a covariate in a latent class regression model (Collins and Lanza 2010). In both cases, measurement invariance is ordinarily assumed: that is, party ratings should not differ between the supporters of different parties. This requirement is, however, stricter when using group membership as a covariate. Since assuming complete measurement invariance did not make sense in our case—it cannot be assumed that partisans of different parties give ratings with all the same probabilities—we opted for the former approach.[4] Not assuming measurement invariance means that additional caution should be taken when interpreting the model. Most importantly, membership in a certain class does not necessarily have the same interpretation for respondents belonging to different partisan groups (Collins and Lanza 2010).

We used the tidyLPA package for R to perform the analysis (Rosenberg et al., 2018), which uses the Mclust R package to fit models (Scrucca et al., 2016). Before fitting a model, the number of clusters needs to be decided. Furthermore, tidyLPA allows for fitting four different kinds of models when using Mclust, which correspond to different assumptions about the variances and covariances of the latent distributions. In model 1, the underlying distributions are assumed to have the same shape across clusters but with zero covariances. Constraining the covariances to zero means that once a person's cluster membership is known, their rating for party A no longer gives any information about their rating for party B. Model 2 allows variances to vary, meaning that the members of one cluster can have a wider or narrower range of attitudes toward a party than the members of another cluster. Model 3 allows, instead, for covariances to differ from zero but constrains them to be equal across clusters. Finally, model 6 allows both to vary freely. Thus, relaxing the assumptions allows for better-fitting but less parsimonious models.

Conducting an LPA is often an iterative process in which a variety of models are fitted and some are retained for the analysis based on a variety of factors, such as goodness-of-fit indices, interpretability of the clusters, and theoretical considerations (Ferguson et al., 2019; Marsh et al. 2004, 2009). We fitted all four models with the number of clusters ranging from 1 to 8 and investigated goodness-of-fit using the Bayesian information criterion (BIC), which penalizes complex models. In choosing which models to focus on, we balanced goodness-of-fit against interpretability and parsimony.

Finally, to explore how membership in affect-based clusters is related to ideology, we placed respondents on economic and sociocultural ideological dimensions based on responses to questions policy preferences included in the data. For the sociocultural dimension, we used six questions that we interpret as related to the Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs. Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist, or GAL-TAN, axis of politics (Hooghe et al., 2002). To measure GAL-TAN placement, we used the same set of questions that Isotalo et al. (2019) use. For the economic left-right axis, we used responses to four questions on economic policy preferences. Appendix A gives the full wording of the questions. Respondents' GAL-TAN and left-right placements were then compared to their cluster assignments, and the clusters placed visually on a two-dimensional ideological map. This gave us an overview of how clusters are situated in the ideological space.

4. Results

4.1. AP indices

The results support our first hypothesis: AP increased in Finland between 2015 and 2019. API rose from 3.90 in 2015 to 4.45 in 2019,

[3] We included weights to retain comparability with Reiljan's earlier analysis, but also performed the analysis with the unweighted scores. The difference is minor.

[4] Note that our theoretical expectation is that each respondent gives a higher score to their in-party than to other parties.

with bootstrap computations giving 99% confidence intervals of 3.75–4.02 and 4.32 to 4.59 in 2019. The average for Finland between 2007 and 2015 was 3.86, meaning that polarization in 2019 was well above what had been previously seen. This also corresponds to a 0.5 point increase over the average of Northwestern European countries, as measured by Reiljan (2020), placing Finland on an equal level with, for example, the UK in 2015 and higher than the US in 2012, but lower than the average countries of Southern or Central Eastern Europe. Fig. 1 shows the trend of API scores over time. See appendix B for a table of exact values.

Should this increase be seen as substantially significant? Essentially, the change corresponds to an average (unweighted) increase in the distances between in-party and out-party ratings of around 0.5 on a scale of 0–10 or slightly less than 1 if we consider the change from 2007 to 2019. It is also worth noting that API previously grew from 3.64 to 4.03 between 2007 and 2011 and decreased again to 3.9 in 2015. The 2011 and 2015 confidence intervals, however, overlap, and it would seem dubious to conclude that the change between those years was substantial. We conclude that AP seems to be on the rise in Finland and is now higher than at any point in the past 12 years but still remains on a moderate level when looked at from an international perspective.

Our second hypothesis is also supported: the increase in AP is driven more by increasing out-party hostility than by increasing in-party favoritism. Fig. 1 also depicts the development of mean in-party ratings, mean out-party ratings, and the mean of the minimum and maximum of the out-party ratings,[5] along with the mean of all party ratings (in- and out-parties included). The mean of the minimum out-party ratings and mean out-party ratings have declined over time and over the past 4 years as well. In essence, the respondents rated out-parties more negatively than before, and they also rated a specific party, the one they liked the least, more negatively than before. A slight upward turn in maximum out-party ratings can be seen as well, meaning that voters increasingly see some party that they did not name as their favorite one in a positive light. Here, the confidence intervals overlap, so this observation must be treated with caution. The latent class analysis we present below sheds further light on this issue. Finally, the mean in-party ratings have also slightly increased over time, indicating increased in-group favoritism. Together, we interpret these findings to mean that AP has increased, primarily driven by out-party affect becoming more negative. However, these changes do not appear overly dramatic, and the mean out-party ratings are still in line with the average among Northwestern European countries, well above the average of Central and Eastern European countries, as described by Reiljan (2020). A substantial change is the roughly 35% decrease in minimum out-party affect from 1.8 in 2007 to 1.15 in 2019, indicating increasingly strong aversion of voters against their least favorite party.

4.2. Interparty affect

We begin addressing our research question concerning affective blocs (RQ1) by examining affect relations between pairs of parties. Fig. 2 shows the average ratings given by each partisan group and Fig. 3 portrays the distance between the in-party and out-party ratings. We find that there are some groups that consistently give good ratings to each other's parties. One such pair is formed by the Left Alliance (LA) and the Greens. In 2007, LA partisans gave the Greens an average rating of 5.2, which rose to 6.8 in 2019, the highest rating they gave to any out-party. Greens partisans' average opinion of LA likewise rose from 5.1 to 6.7, also their highest rating. The Social Democrats (SDP) are moving closer to the Greens and Left. In 2007, Social Democrats gave their highest rating to their former coalition partner the Centre Party (CPF), yet by 2019, the out-parties most liked by SDP partisans were GL and LA, with average ratings of 5.5 and 5.4, respectively. Left Alliance partisans' rating of the SDP also rose from 5.4 in 2007 to 6.6 in 2019. We interpret this as evidence that an "affective bloc" has been forming among these three parties—a proposition that we discuss in more detail below. A look at the heatmap suggests that the Swedish People's Party (SPP) could be considered a tentative member of this bloc. Interestingly, along with the Centre Party, these are also the parties that formed the government after the 2019 election.

We do not find evidence of the development of an counterweight to the red-green affective bloc on the right. Supporters of the right-wing National Coalition Party (NCP) and the Centre Party have given each other's parties above-average ratings throughout the period, but both have decreased. Neither is there significant warmth between these parties and the right-wing populist Finns Party (FP), as described in more detail below. The generally conservative Christian Democrats (CD) partisans give somewhat higher ratings to all of the aforementioned three parties than to others, but this is not entirely reciprocated—for partisans of NCP, both the Swedish People's Party and the Greens appear more likeable than CD. Centre partisans gave the populist right Finns Party (FP) a score of 4.8 in 2007, which dropped to 3.7 in 2019.

Finally, because it has become commonplace in political discourse to argue that the rise of populist parties leads to increased polarization, it is interesting to take a closer look at the attitudes towards the Finns Party. In 2007, these were not much colder than the attitudes toward other parties, perhaps because in 2007 the FP was hardly a major political player. Attitudes cooled in 2011, when FP became one of the largest parties, and for the most became even colder between 2015 and 2019. By 2019, FP is, on average, the most disliked party. SDP, Left and Green partisans especially displayed animosity towards FP, giving their all-time lowest ratings for the party in 2019. Centre and National Coalition supporters also distanced themselves from FP during the whole time period, the former also between 2015 and 2019. NCP, however, is the only party whose supporters gave FP a slightly higher rating in 2019 compared to 2015. The group that has most consistently displayed antagonism towards the Finns Party are those supporting the Swedish People's Party, who in 2007 gave FP a rating of 2.4 in 2007 and in 2019 gave them a score of just 0.98. This dislike is partly, but not completely, reciprocated by FP partisans. They fairly consistently disliked almost all other parties throughout the period. In 2007, the average distance between the FP supporters' evaluations of their own party and of others was around 3.8; in 2019, it was around 5. Interestingly, in 2019, those affiliated with the right-wing or conservative-leaning CD, NCP, and CPF gave the Finns Party a higher score than FP supporters gave to these parties. However, PS partisans also gave the Swedish People's Party, the Social Democrats, the Left Alliance, and the Greens a higher score than the other way around.

4.3. Affective blocs

We investigated the clustering of respondents into affective blocs using LPA. We focus on the most robust results, regardless of the number of clusters or chosen model parameterizations. However, because of the exploratory nature of this analysis, we also discuss how results change when the number of clusters and model parameterizations are varied, hence making our interpretative process as transparent to the reader as possible within the limits of the available space.

Fig. 1C in appendix C shows the BIC values associated with the various solutions we fitted to the data. Based on BIC values alone, the best solution would be model 2 with 8 clusters. However, in all cases, the BIC decreases only marginally when the number of clusters is increased above three or four. Since our aim was to find a number of clusters that is substantially smaller than the total number of parties, we focused on solutions with at most four clusters. We also considered models that constrain covariances to zero to better align with our theoretical expectations, because these allow us to attribute all correlations in party

[5] Consider that each respondent gives a rating to N parties. To calculate this, we took the minimum (maximum) of these ratings and then took the average across all respondents.

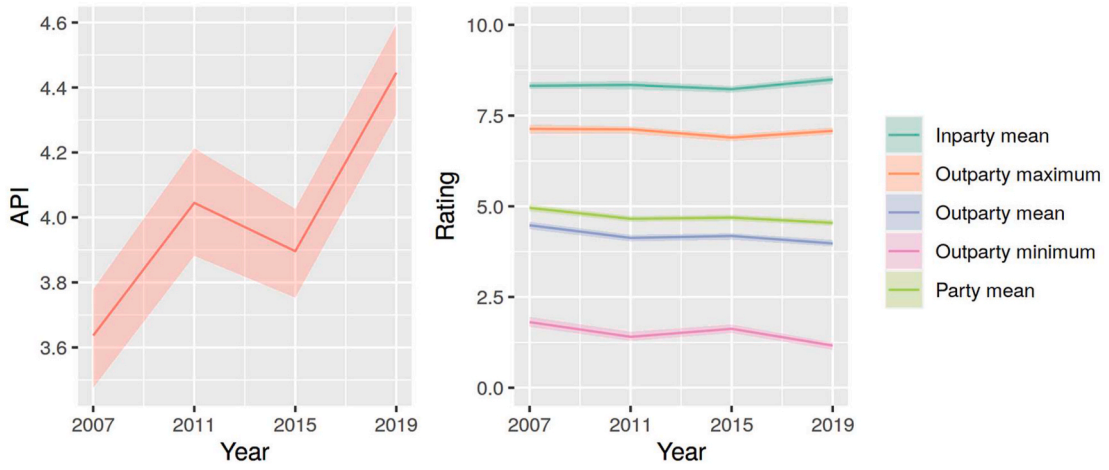

Fig. 1. Index value and rating trends over time. See Appendix B for corresponding tables.

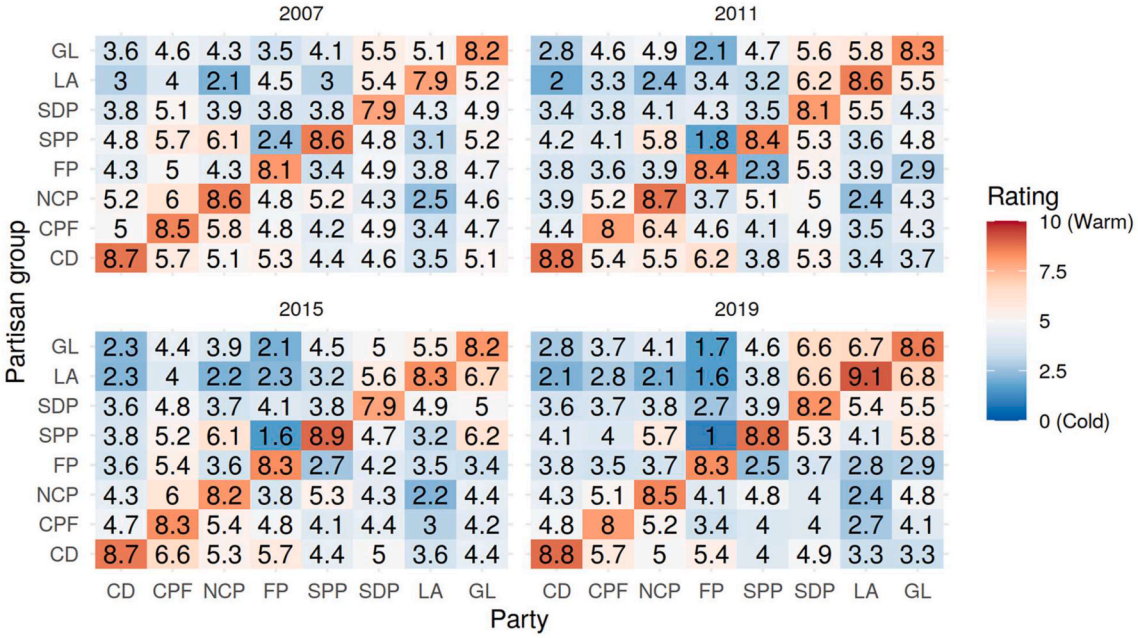

Fig. 2. Mean party ratings of each partisan group for the years 2007–2019. Larger values (warmer colours) indicate that a partisan groups opinion of a party is favourable.

ratings to cluster membership, thus making the models more straightforward to interpret.

Permitting variances to vary across clusters makes theoretical sense because it would allow a cluster to have a wider or narrower range of opinions on a party than other clusters. In practice, despite their better statistical fit, model 2 solutions that allow for this variation were less interpretable and contained clusters of more varying sizes. Balancing goodness-of-fit considerations, interpretability, and model parsimony, we focused our analysis primarily on solutions corresponding to model specification 1 and present figures and tables related to the four-cluster solution. However, our findings are based on a consideration of patterns in many solutions, as well as changes that occur when parameterizations are modified. Appendix C contains figures and tables related to other model 1 and model 2 solutions.

We find, first, a red-green cluster. This cluster, shown in Fig. 4, is associated with a very favorable view of the Left Alliance, the Social Democrats, and the Greens. This cluster shows dislike towards the other parties, particularly the Finns Party. As shown in Fig. 5, the vast majority of LA partisans belong to this cluster, as do a majority of Green and many SDP partisans. Respondents with no partisan identity are relatively uncommon in this cluster. This cluster is quite robust to changes in our models. A similar cluster appears in all solutions, although increasing the number of clusters or loosening parameter restrictions shows that the core of this cluster consists of Green and Left partisans, whereas supporters of SDP move to other clusters in larger numbers when the model assumptions are modified; here, antagonism towards Finns Party emerges more strongly as a defining feature of the cluster.

A second key finding is the existence of a moderate cluster with mostly neutral or positive attitudes toward almost all parties. An exception is FP, towards which this cluster displays animosity, although not nearly as strongly as the red-green bloc. This cluster contains the largest share of SDP partisans, as well as respondents who support the Swedish People's Party, although its small size means that the latter constitute a small portion of it. Many Greens, Centre, and National Coalition supporters are also found in this cluster. However, this cluster is particularly popular among non-partisans, who form the largest group

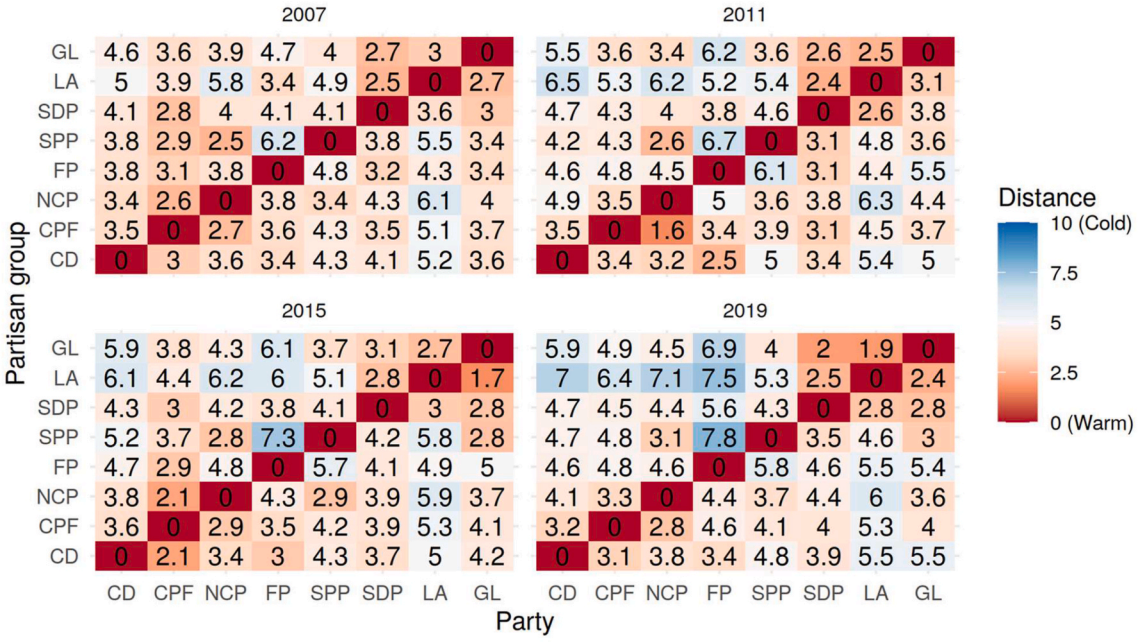

Fig. 3. Differences between the mean inparty ratings and outparty ratings of each partisan group for the years 2007–2019. Larger values (colder colours) indicate that a party is viewed negatively compared to the inparty.

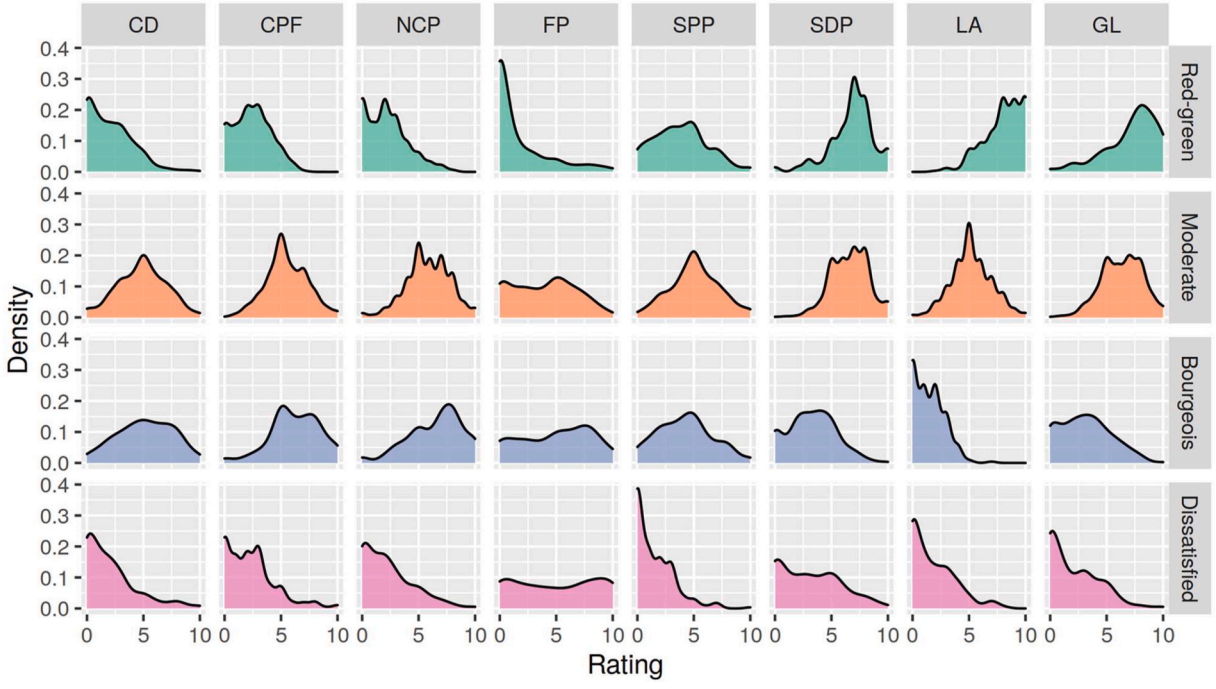

Fig. 4. Distributions of party ratings for each cluster.

within it. This cluster is also quite robust. A similar cluster makes an appearance in almost all the models we experimented with. It is usually the biggest one and draws in a combination of CPF, NCP, and SDP partisans as well as non-partisans. One interpretation is that this cluster consists of respondents without a strong partisan identity and, consequently, small inparty and outparty biases. Belonging to this cluster could also be interpreted as being broadly supportive of the traditional order of Finnish politics and the traditional big three parties: CPF, NCP, and SDP.

A third cluster is almost the mirror image of the red–green cluster. In particular, LA is viewed with hostility by this cluster, which tends to have a favorable opinion of NCP and CPF. However, an important difference between this cluster and the red–green one is that this cluster has no clear consensus on the Finns Party. Opinions lean slightly positive, but many members also have a very negative view of FP. Smaller in size than the red–green cluster, this cluster contains respondents who are close to the National Coalition, the Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, and, to some extent, the Finns Party and the Swedish People's Party. Similar to the first cluster, this one also does not include very many non-partisans.

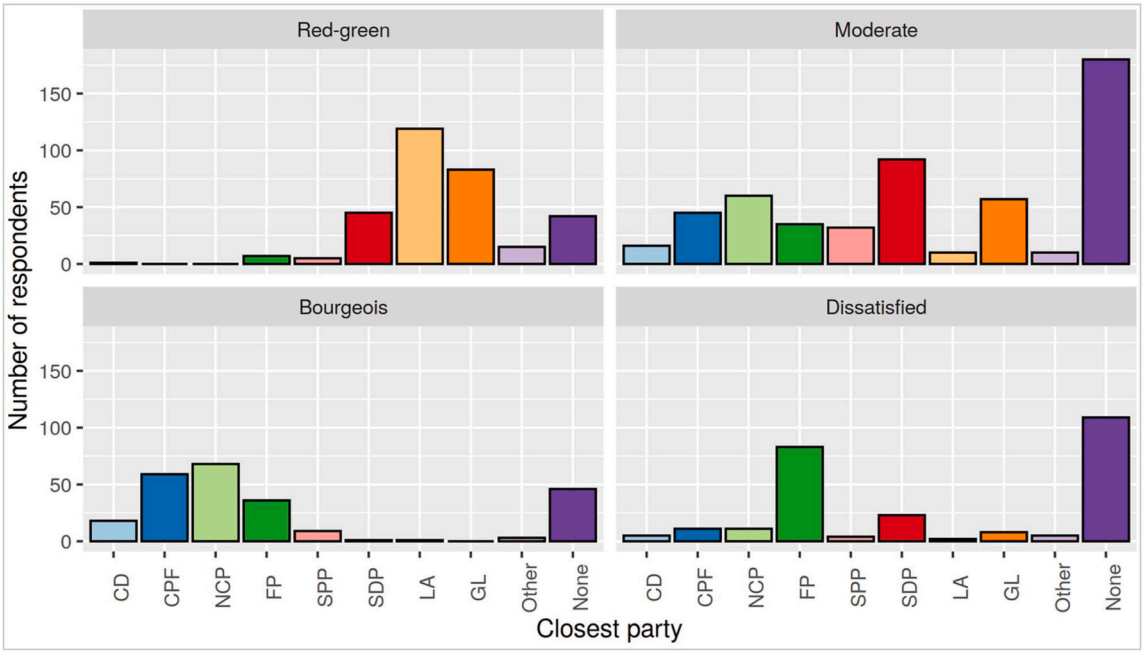

Fig. 5. Cluster prevalence across partisan groups. Each bar indicates the number of respondents assigned to the cluster who feel close to a party.

The smallest, fourth cluster has a negative opinion of almost all parties. The only party that is not viewed primarily with disdain is the Finns Party, but even for this party the distribution of ratings is mostly flat, with a slight unimodal tendency. Similar to the moderate cluster, non-partisans are the largest group within this cluster. However, the Finns Party heavily dominates among partisan members. Some SDP, CPF and NCP partisans also join this cluster. The empirical distribution of FP ratings is bimodal, indicating that non-Finns partisans assigned to this cluster do not necessarily belong to it because they like the Finns Party.

In contrast to the first two, the latter two clusters are less robust. In the two-cluster solution, many FP, CPF, and NCP partisans are assigned to a cluster that is hostile to the red–green parties but is not unified in supporting any other set of parties. Freeing the variance constraint in the four-cluster solution instead leads to an emergence of a cluster in which many FP, SDP, LA and GL supporters are clustered together, apparently because of an opposition to NCP and warmer affect towards the traditional working-class parties.

To answer our second research question concerning the relationship

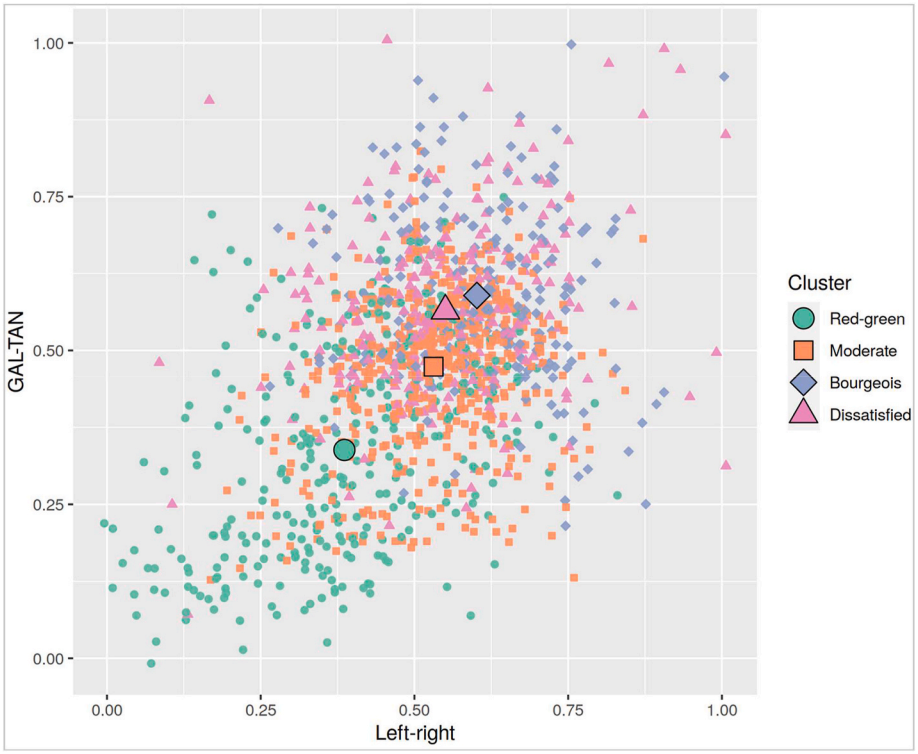

Fig. 6. Ideological positions of the clusters. Large symbols mark cluster means.

between cluster membership and ideology, we plotted the respondents' left-right positions against their GAL-TAN positions, and investigated how clusters appear on this map. As shown in Fig. 6, the clusters occupy specific ideological regions, but with significant overlap. Most prominently, the red-green cluster is overwhelmingly left-wing and socioculturally liberal. The moderate cluster has overlap with the red-green cluster, but appears close to the center on both dimensions. The third and fourth clusters are difficult to distinguish ideologically, as both are economically on the right and lean conservative. On average, cluster three is slightly more conservative and right-wing than cluster four, but the differences, especially on the sociocultural dimension, are small.

In three-cluster solutions, the moderate cluster appears near the center, clearly distinct from the red-green cluster and overlapping more with the right-conservative cluster. While distinguishing between the moderate cluster and the third cluster is more difficult, the main differences seem to be sociocultural. Further decreasing the number of clusters yields a situation in which the split occurs along the diagonal, with socioculturally liberal and economically left-wing respondents in one cluster, conservative and right-wing respondents in the other, and significant overlap in the middle.

Thus, our analysis clearly demonstrates the existence of a *red-green affective bloc* in the Finnish population, corresponding mainly to the red-green cluster identifiable in all models. This bloc is ideologically uniform, with a socioculturally liberal and economically left-of-center worldview. The situation is not symmetric, and this bloc has no clear counterweight. If only three blocs were to be used to characterize the Finnish voters, the other end of the diagonal would be occupied by what we might call an *antiliberal* bloc, joining together socially conservative and economically right-wing people who particularly dislike the red-green parties. However, it seems more appropriate to see this as two different blocs instead. A *bourgeois bloc* views the Centre Party and National Coalition favourably and has a related partisan identity. The other bloc is hostile towards all parties, except the Finns, and mainly consists of Finns partisans and non-partisans. Finally, the evidence points at the existence of a large *moderate bloc*, which does not display strong partisan affect, is largely non-partisan, is broadly supportive of Finland's traditional political order, and has a centrist political outlook. When it comes to the relationship between partisan affect and ideology, we find that the red-greens are well separated from the conservative and right-leaning blocs ideologically. Neither the economic left-right nor the sociocultural GAL-TAN dimensions explain the animosity that exists between the traditional bourgeois parties and the populist Finns Party, but the three-cluster solution hints that the sociocultural dimension is more important.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Previous research has shown that affective polarization is observable in American (Iyengar and Westwood 2015) and European political systems (Reiljan 2020; Gidron et al., 2019), but knowledge concerning its nature and causes—particularly in multiparty systems—remains limited. In the current paper, we set out to examine the dynamics of AP in Finland, a case where the political system has, in international comparison, long been characterized by low levels of polarization. One reason for this low polarization is that government coalitions often consist of many parties from left to right. This reduces interparty conflict because parties need to work together to achieve their goals. Historically speaking, the long period of consensualism in Finland since the 1950's has been attributed to the need to stand united to face Soviet/Russian pressures (Alapuro 1999; Ylä-Anttila 2010: 101–102), which has led Arter (2015) to characterize Finnish consensualism as "compulsory consensus".

We find that even in this consensual context, AP has increased and that this increase has accelerated over the past four years, in line with our first hypothesis. This increase is rather substantial, placing Finland in 2019 above the average of the countries of Northwestern Europe—but still below the average in other parts of Europe (Reiljan 2020). The increase in AP may partly be attributed to general polarizing developments around the world during this time period, such as Brexit, the Trump presidency and the European migrant crisis. Many have also argued that the development of social media drives polarization (Tucker et al., 2018). But our analysis shows that the immediate reasons for the increase in AP in Finland are rise and increasing anti-globalism of the right populist Finns Party and the corresponding strengthening of what we call the *red-green affective bloc*.

As predicted by our second hypothesis, this increase in AP is mainly driven by increased out-party hostility, even though in-party favoritism has also increased slightly. This finding and our further analysis of the reasons behind it shed light on the role of the right-populist parties that have grown significantly in most European multiparty democracies in creating AP. Our findings suggest that that increasing AP in Finland is driven by the Finns Party, and this is more related to the fact that they are viewed in an increasingly negative light by others than to them displaying hostility. Attitudes toward the Finns grew colder between 2015 and 2019, especially among red–green parties but also among parties on the right. Thus, although our LPA tends to place Finns supporters closer to the National Coalition and Centre Parties, by and large, this is not because their supporters would see each other as friends; instead, it is because they share enemies (in the Greens and Left Alliance in particular). In line with this result, there was great reluctance among other parties to enter a coalition with the Finns after the 2019 election, whereas the Finns were open to cooperation with most of the other parties if policy could be agreed on. That supporters of right-populist parties display less hostility toward other parties than vice versa has also been observed in other countries (Reiljan 2020). This disparity has also been noted by Westinen et al. (2020), who attribute the strong anti-FP stances of other parties' supporters, in particular those of the Greens, Left Alliance and SPP, to major ideological differences between these parties – but this does not really explain why hostility is asymmetrical.

One clear explanation for the increase in hostility towards the Finns Party from 2015 to 2019 is that the party split in 2017. The moderate wing of the party left, and under the new leader Jussi Halla-Aho, who is a controversial figure convicted of hate speech towards immigrants, the party became more strongly associated with views on ethnic and religious minorities that are likely to be considered immoral by many opponents. These developments have likely increased hostility towards the Finns Party, but not necessarily Finns Party supporters' hostility towards other parties. Another possible explanation for the asymmetry in the dislike between the Left, Greens and the SPP on one side and the Finns on the other is that populist challenger parties tend to position themselves against "political elites", supposedly consisting of all other, more established parties (Mudde 2004). This positioning is reflected in the Finns Party supporters in our data being critical of all other parties, rating them an average of 3.3, while the Greens, Left and SPP rate all other parties relatively high (an average of 4.3, 3.7 and 4.3, respectively), but just one, the Finns, very low (1.7, 1.6 and 1). Thus there is much negativity towards others among the Finns supporters but it is more equally divided among other parties, whereas the negativity of the Greens, Left and SPP is strongly focused on the Finns, creating the asymmetry we observe.

To understand AP in a multiparty setting, we suggested that it is useful to go beyond observing the changes of single aggregate metrics such as the API and to use LPA to find what we term *affective blocs*—groups of voters that display warm affect toward several parties and/or disdain toward another set of parties. Using this approach to answer our open research question 1, we found people to be separated into affective blocs. We found a strong *red–green bloc*, consisting of supporters of the Greens, the Left Alliance, and the Social Democrats, who, in general, have a similar outlook on which parties are good and which are bad. We also found a *moderate bloc*, consisting of supporters of traditional relatively centrist parties, who view the parties at the

extremes of the political spectrum with suspicion. In addition, parts of the supporter bases of the National Coalition Party, Centre Party, Christian Democrats, and Finns Party appear to form what we have called the *bourgeois bloc*, with a favorable view of the NCP and Centre Party and a negative opinion of the red–green parties. Finally, the Finns Party is mostly separated into its own *dissatisfied bloc*, which tends to view all parties with some hostility. Because the clusters corresponding to the latter two blocs are smaller, less unified, and less robust in our analysis, we could alternatively interpret that alongside the left–green and moderate blocs, there is an *antiliberal bloc* that is drawn together primarily by their hostility toward the Left Alliance, the Greens, and the Swedish People's Party but not agreeing on which parties to support. These findings suggest that operationalizations of AP used in earlier research that equate the in-group of each voter with just one party and its supporters may not fully capture the dynamics of AP in multiparty systems.

Previous studies (Iyengar et al., 2012; Reiljan 2020) suggest that ideology only partially explains AP. The findings that respond to our research question 2 support this view. Ideological outlook and partisan affect go hand-in-hand for some parties and blocs. The Left Alliance and the National Coalition sit at the opposing ends of the economic left-right axis, and we find a large affective distance between these parties. On the sociocultural GAL-TAN axis, the Christian Democrats and the Finns Party at the conservative end are distant from the Greens, the Left, and the Swedish People's Party at the liberal end, and the status of the Swedish language also pits the Finns Party against the Swedish People's Party (Westinen 2016; Westinen et al., 2016; Grönlund and Westinen 2012). These differences also match the patterns of affect we observe.

This bloc analysis is useful for understanding the sources of increasing AP in Finland. The rise of the Finns party has been commensurated by the strengthening of the red-green bloc. The Left Alliance, Social Democrats and Greens are united in affective terms by both their dislike of the Finns Party and their increasingly warm affect towards one another. In addition to being united by a common opponent in the Finns Party, the Left, SDP and Greens were in opposition together against the right-wing government formed by the Centre, the NCP and the Finns from 2015 to 2019, which also likely contributed to increasing their mutual affection.

Our analysis also found the Centre Party, National Coalition and Finns Party to be united by who they dislike but not who they like, yet we found no clear matching ideological differences. Deeper down, these parties' bases have sociostructural and ideological differences that are not reflected in our analysis. In the latest election, NCP and FP were more popular than CPF among younger voters, CPF got most of its votes from rural areas, and NCP's voters are more likely to be urban and highly educated (Suuronen et al., 2020). Ideologically, FP voters differ from the other two groups by being much more critical of immigration, bilingualism and prioritizing environmental values over the economy, and from National Coalition voters by being more conservative (Suuronen et al., 2020). The Finns Party base is also much more critical of political elites than that of any other party (Suuronen et al., 2020). In Sweden, this critical stance towards elites has been identified as an important predictor of attitudes between the right-populist Sweden Democrats and the center-right Alliance bloc (Ryan and Reiljan 2021). A comprehensive examination of party attitudes and affective polarization should consider relevant sociostructural cleavages as well as a nuanced picture of ideological divisions. A reasonable conjecture is that the blocs we find are connected to social and political identities that are larger than identification with single parties. Partisanship is often 'bounded', in that people in certain social contexts choose between supporting their socially closest party or not supporting it, but are unlikely to support another party (Zuckerman and Kroh 2006; Neundorf et al., 2011). Thus, the examination of these broader identities and their contribution to affective polarization is a potential avenue for future research.

Following the development of the kinds of affective blocs we discovered can potentially be useful for assessing the likelihood of the capability of certain parties forming functional government coalitions in multiparty systems. The government coalition which formed after the 2019 election consists of the parties supported by the members of the red–green bloc (the Left Alliance, Social Democrats, and Greens), as well as two parties (the Centre Party and the Swedish People's Party) that they find tolerable. Our heatmap analysis of affect relations between pairs of parties over time showed that relationships between these parties had grown warmer in the years preceding the formation of the government coalition. Towards the right and conservative ends of the ideological spectrums, we observed a contrasting development: supporters of the National Coalition and Centre like each other's parties, as well as the Finns Party less than in 2007. If partisan affect is a determinant of which parties can form coalitions, our analysis also reveals other pairs and groups of parties for which cooperation would likely be possible (such as the National Coalition and Centre Party) and others that could hardly cooperate in government under any circumstances, such as the Finns Party at one end and the Greens and Left Alliance at the other.

Of particular interest, especially if the trend toward more clear-cut affective blocs we discovered continues, is whether voters' separation into these blocs aligns with the respective parties' political goals. In forming coalitions, parties need to agree on policy positions, but their ability to form working coalitions might be hampered if voters like or dislike potential coalition partners for reasons unrelated to policy or, perhaps, for ostensibly ideological reasons that are nevertheless not necessarily based on a consistent set of political attitudes (Mason 2018). That there appears to be more enmity among supporters of conservative and right-wing parties than on the left is interesting in this sense.

One limitation of the current study is that our measure of AP is based on assigning each respondent only one party that they are assumed to consider as their in-group. Although this is the best we can do with the available data, this is a crude simplification, and in reality, in-group and out-group affect would be better captured by data that allowed in-groups to consist of more than one party. We get around this with our cluster analysis, which shows that respondents indeed form blocs within which positive and negative affect are somewhat consistently directed at certain parties. However, the relationship these blocs have with partisan or other social identities merits further study. Measures have been developed to capture notions of expressive partisanship, with questions designed to implicitly measure how people think and feel about parties (Bankert et al., 2015; Greene 1999, 2004; Huddy et al., 2018). Such conceptions of partisanship could perhaps be adapted to operationalize more multifaceted in-group and out-group divisions. Indeed, Garry (2007) presents a two-question measure that allows for multiple party identification.

A smaller limitation is that our analysis did not take survey weights into account. Following Reiljan (2020), we computed the API using unweighted data and by limiting the analysis to partisans. Not using survey weights could slightly affect the results, but the API itself uses party vote shares as weights, which should mostly solve this issue. We also performed the LPA without weights, because tidyLPA, the package we used, does not support using them. Consequently, the importance of certain parties in determining the affective blocs we found could be slightly over- or underestimated. Most importantly, voters of the Greens and Left Alliance are overrepresented in the data, whereas National Coalition voters are underrepresented. This may have the effect of making the first bloc appear slightly larger and more uniform than it should, but the imbalances of the data are small enough for us to expect that the main patterns would remain the same if the data were perfectly balanced. Furthermore, because of a degree of measurement non-invariance in our data, we cannot straightforwardly assume that all the respondents belong in a group for the same reasons. We explored the effects of measurement invariance violations by looking at how the distributions or party ratings differed within clusters when the respondents were grouped by party affiliation. Although partisans tend to rate their own party higher than do others, the ratings of other parties

are more uniform. Finally, when asked to rate parties, people tend to think of party elites, and opinions of supporters are less negative (Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Knudsen 2020).

Apart from addressing some of the limitations addressed above, for example by improving the measurement of in-group affiliation, future research could further analyze the kind of affective blocs we discovered. One avenue would be to analyze the extent to which affective blocs exist in other multiparty systems and whether they seem to become more salient over time, as we have found in Finland. The findings of such research could improve the understanding of how affective blocs are related to ideological and social cleavages and what this tells us about the nature of AP. We found that affective divisions take place between ideologically adjacent parties, especially among conservatives and rightists. This suggests that more fine-grained ideological divisions or, perhaps more importantly, other social cleavages and social identities play a role in party affect. Especially given that much of the research on affective polarization has so far concerned two-party systems where economic and sociocultural dimensions and many identities align along party lines, studying these relationships would be vital. This, in turn, would help in understanding the conditions under which attempts at cross-party collaboration for the common good would fail, as well as those opposing conditions under which collaboration across party lines is successful.

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Appendices. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102367.

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